

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut. In the spirit of reconciliation, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community, and to pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. So today we are global. We have one guest who's currently sitting in France and one in the UK. Pauline, would you like to introduce yourself?

Pauline Rebourgeon:

Hi Michelle, although I do work from Ireland usually and so my role really is to drive the learning innovation agenda at Ericsson within Peter's team and there is a couple of facets to my role I guess. One is to explore and try and leverage the latest technology at Ericsson and for that we are counting on a community that we call learning next that has about 450 members at the moment that consists of learning and development professionals, but actually anyone really linked directly or indirectly to training or just really enthusiastic about learning innovation and wanting to make an impact. So we leveraged that community then to run experiments and pilots on different technologies and how they can be applied to learning and development.

Michelle Ockers:

Which is what today's conversation is all about. I'm very excited for this conversation. Welcome back to Learning Uncut, Peter. You were our guest earlier this year, 2024, on episode 147, where we spoke about how Ericsson is putting skills to work. And you're joining us again. Would you like to reintroduce yourself and tell us a little more about your role in the context of this work we're discussing today about experimentation and innovation with technology for L&D.

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah, sure, Michelle. And it's a pleasure to be back. So thank you for inviting me back. And it's also a privilege for me to have Pauline in my team who drives the innovation work. My role is all about enabling the learning environment in Ericsson. And that really ranges all the way from the innovation work through to creating all of the technical infrastructure through to working on things like job and skills architecture and dealing with delivery, transformation and so on. So it's everything about creating the environment of learning in Ericsson. That's what my role is all about.

Michelle Ockers:

Fabulous. Thank you. And I know Ericsson is globally known for your work in telecommunications. If you can give us a brief introduction to set the context to Ericsson and its workforce.

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah, we are the organization that is responsible for 4G, 5G, and we hope, fingers crossed, 6G coming not too far away. And what we do is we create the connections between your mobile phone and another mobile phone. So we do all the bit in between, all of that global infrastructure that enables mobile telecoms to work. And we've been doing that a long time. We've been doing that since 1876 in terms of helping to connect people around the world. And that's fundamentally what Ericsson is about. It's about enabling people to connect whatever country you're from, whatever part of the world you are from. So yes, that's what

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we do. We have a whole range of employees that help us achieve that. I have over 100,000 colleagues that help us achieve that great vision. And they range from manufacturing through to field service, through to sales and delivery. So a whole range of functions within quite a large corporate organization.

Michelle Ockers:

And distributed globally, right?

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah, exactly. So globally, we operate in 180 countries. So I think 180 out of, I think it's something like 234 countries in the world. So most of the countries in the world we are operating in somewhere and delivering exactly, connecting people as much as we can.

Michelle Ockers:

So your L&D team structure, then I imagine it would be fairly decentralised, Peter?

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah, it's completely decentralized, distributed. So we have a small central team that is essentially made up of my team, that's responsible for the ecosystem. And then secondly, I have a colleague who works on critical skill learning programs and certification. Those are the two main central teams. Then we have, which is a role that I came from actually originally, which is to head up learning for different regions. So we have five market areas. We have a whole number of business areas as well. And each of those business areas and market areas has a head of learning associated with them, plus a small team. And we also have a separate team that is responsible for customer learning as well. It's a highly decentralized organization.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, so that's a fair amount of context. So as a technology company, it's great that Ericsson is exploring AI as a key area of innovation, and of course, nowhere more so than through the learning next community. Pauline, so can you tell us, give us a little bit of background because the Learning Next community has been going for longer than your exploration of AI. So perhaps if you can tell us a little bit about how, you know, where the Learning Next community came from and how you've built that community.

Pauline Rebourgeon:

Right. So the Learning Next community actually was not really a community when it started. And it actually started before my time at Ericsson. It used to be more of a program. The ambition was already there, was to really drive innovation within learning and development. But it consisted of a few learning and development professionals from different teams who would gather together, work on an agenda and then explore experiments with different technologies. And it used to be a lot around XR, so what we call virtual reality and augmented reality. When I joined Ericsson, obviously, you know, my mission that Peter gave me was really how do we make it grow? How do we make more impact and really try and experiment a bit more with all the different technologies to answer specific problems that needs to be solved within learning and development and within Ericsson. So after a bit of time, I've decided to open up a bit more to create a community rather than a program because I realized that not everyone had the same interest in the different technologies that we were exploring. So I wanted to get a bit more engagement and we started to build some sort of a funnel. It's not something I actually came up with from the start. I realized I think it's getting now more of a funnel because we really try to reach as many people as possible in Ericsson, drive awareness about what we do, get people hooked and get people engaged.

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We run what we call the Learning Next Forum, which takes place every month and is a place for everyone in the community to share about their work, their projects, their ideas, and inspire others to then innovate. And this is really where everyone comes together. But then we have what we call focus groups or different experiments. And this is where we're going to recruit those who are really interested in that specific use case. For example, automated translation. We gathered, I believe, 25 participants from different countries who would speak 25 different languages to then test the technology. So it's really about trying to see what's in it for them and then making something happen together to then create an impact.

Michelle Ockers:

And has the company as a whole, Peter, embraced AI wholeheartedly or was there a little bit of work you had to do to engage and influence stakeholders to support the use of AI and the exploration of AI in L&D?

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah, I would say, Michelle, that we are fairly fortunate in that innovation is really important to Ericsson. If we're going to make that next step to 6G and so on and moving through the Gs, then it becomes really important. It also has become important for us as a business because what we try to do is anticipate problems in telecoms networks. And we have something that we call an operations engine, which embraces AI. So AI is fundamentally important to our business. And that, of course, helps us to get engagement as an L&D function. So yes, I would say we have. We've also created an AI playground. And what different organizations have been encouraged to do is to come up with experiments and ideas. So to some extent, we are pushing at an open door when we want to come up with experiments and new projects related to AI. I'd also say AI has that kind of rare combination of both enabling efficiency within the organization and combining that with innovation. And that combination means that within AI, AI can help with cost savings, but it can also help with improved employee experience. And that is fundamentally attractive to the organization. So, you know, efficiency with innovation really works well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, it does. And there's so many possibilities. And speaking of possibilities, Pauline, you talked about setting up focus groups. I know when we were talking before the podcast recording, you were talking about work streams. So I don't know if the work streams are the same thing as the focus groups, but perhaps if you'd like us to like to introduce us to the areas that you're focusing on to explore the use of AI and L&D and how you decided to focus on those specific areas.

Pauline Rebourgeon:

The focus groups are more related around the broader technology. So we do have a focus group in AI that helps us create the most relevant, suitable strategy for Ericsson. And that is where actually these work streams are coming from. And that helps us then explore where we want to create impact with the help from AI. We have four different work streams to explore AI. The first one is the obvious one and what everyone is focused on at the moment. You know, seeing that in the community, I think the community is driving this one. It's around content creation and curation. This is, I would say, part of our short term wins. You know, it's not really changing how people might learn, but it's helping us create content faster, less budget, sometimes maybe with better quality and making us more productive. So we have a couple of use cases that we're exploring without work streams. We are in parallel working on work streams that I find even more interesting, which is around how is this going to impact how we learn at Ericsson? And the first one being coaching and simulations. So this one is around One that I particularly like, and I know Peter as well is a big fan of, is how can we

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democratize coaching? Something that is not accessible to many people within each company. How do we actually give that opportunity to get that coaching session, one-to-one coaching session, when you don't get that opportunity with a human? It's not really to replace, but it's actually how do you get to that point early in your career? And we're also very interested in simulations as well. How can you practice at the moment of need? Instead of going through a training, usual classroom environment, and you might do a role play with a colleague. Here it's about, OK, I might have a call tomorrow with a very angry customer. How do I deal with this right now and help me get through that? We're very interested in that as well. Here, this is really a bit more in the exploration phase. We are very conscious that we don't always want to be looking for the new technology, the new supplier, but actually what are existing suppliers or existing providers doing? What's on their roadmap and how can we work with them to start enabling or using enablement as a next step for the employee journey? And then finally, the fourth work stream which Peter is more familiar with is around skills and assessment. And I believe that was part of the previous podcast.

Michelle Ockers:

It was indeed. So you've got an experimentation process that you use, which is one of the things that I think helps to bring some rigor around the work you're doing in innovation across different work streams. Do you want to pick maybe something, a simpler quick win project? You mentioned the AI-driven translation project earlier, and just bring the experimentation process to life by walking through how that kind of use case was explored, experimented with, and a decision made based on the experimentation that was done, Pauline?

Pauline Rebourgeon:

Translation is not the sexiest experiment to do. It's something that I guess I get from my background as an instructional designer. I've worked at creating content and learning experiences for a few years before I moved toward focused on innovation. But I know that this is something that you know, it is challenging to add, to incorporate into a project. Sometimes it costs half of the budget of a course is around translation. And it's something as well that was also discussed in some of the focus groups that we had carried out over the last month. So I was very interested to see, you know, is translation going to be something that could be improved, the translation process, with the help from generative AI? We know that translation or domain translation is not the best quality with more traditional tools. What happens with GPT? And it was reported that actually the translation aspect of GPT was a bit of a surprise almost at how good it was at translating from one language to another. And me being French, obviously, I speak two languages. I can also check for myself. And I was always very impressed by the tool, how it could do it actually better than me, I would say. We've been keeping very close relationship with different more technical teams within the business, one of them being the automation and AI team. And the goal here was for us to leverage capabilities, resources, tools that are created or generated outside the learning and development that we can benefit from, instead of having to create everything by ourselves. So we knew that they were working on a translation tool, which was actually using something fairly standard. It's like, OK, yes, that's great. But we want GPT. We want to test now what generative AI can do with translation and see if that actually can help us solve a business problem around the cost of translation and also inclusivity. Because if it's something that is very accessible, it becomes something much easier to implement in more programs. So they went on with it and they implemented GPT-4 within their system and we've decided to bring it to the Learning Next community, and get volunteers to test as many languages as possible. Actually, we took the list from our previous compliance training. And we looked for volunteers who were native in these languages. That was actually the biggest challenge, but thankfully your community is quite broad covering most parts of the world. So

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we were able to, I think over 99% of the languages that were in that list to test on this compliance training and see is that good enough? And the results of this proof of concept was that actually for most of the languages, it was either excellent or very good translation. and will require a very minimum editing by your reviewer. And so with the success from this proof of concept, we are now running a couple of pilots in parallel to see is that, does that still stand for real life programs? And this is where we're at right now with translations.

Peter Sheppard:

And maybe, Michelle, I'll just explain a little bit one of those pilots. So one of the pilots is that we have a legal requirement to translate certification exams in Canada into French. And so this is enabling us to do that in a much more efficient way. Now, what you see from Pauline is, and she's done a fabulous job of this, create the power of community. You know, we have over 400 people in our Learning Next community. And that really enables us to connect faster, more efficiently with stakeholders and almost stakeholders to be the other way around. Stakeholders approach us and say, well, could we do something around this? So that is being really effective. I mean, I'll give you a perhaps a tougher example than the translation one, which is an AI coaching app. Now, why a coaching app is interesting as an AI more difficult use case is because it kind of turns normal text-based AI on its head. you're not asking the questions, the actual AI bot is asking you the questions and that turns it round. Not only do you want it to do that, you want it to be able to step through a coaching process and the AI engine to learn that coaching process and get better at it. So we have, Pauline's introduced a build, buy, or wait methodology. And what we've done with this so far is we've started to build, and we've done that with six people from our technical organization who tried to build. Now, they've encountered issues with this, and it's the sort of issues you come across are latency issues. When you give your response, then it takes quite a long time for the next question to come up. And that latency is a problem in some of these AI coaching tools. So now we're looking at, well, is build the right solution? Do we need to wait a little until we can buy something that is more effective? Or do we continue the build process? We're right at that kind of decision-making point. And being flexible, being focused about that decision-making I think is really important in some of these AI experiments to make sure that you don't waste time, that you get the solutions as quickly as possible.

Michelle Ockers:

So I would imagine that that build, buy or wait decision is going to come at different points in the life cycle of any experiment. So imagine, Pauline, that for the translation, it was kind of fairly obvious that you should be able to, well, I don't know how much building was required, or whether it's almost like this is a kind of a native functionality or capability of gen AI, and it doesn't take too much to actually work with the tool in itself. I mean, do you have a certain point in your process where that build, buy or wait decision normally gets made, or is it all over the place, depending on the experiment?

Pauline Rebourgeon:

We're really starting with what are we actually trying to achieve instead of starting from the solution. So when it came to translations, where are the pain points and where can the technology support? And then we looked at the solution. It was fairly easy for the translation experiment because we could rely on this technical team, the automation and AI team, to come up with the tool. And it wasn't too much of an effort for them to implement it and to sow the benefits. So what we had to do is actually convince them that we were going to have a return on investment if that pilot was successful, if our hypothesis was right. Why we went for build is usually the best option if we consider security, which is something that is very important for Ericsson. Especially when it comes to generative values, making sure that we're not compromising any information or data that would be internal to the business and

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building solutions help us with that, in that, we're still in a safe environment for us. And it was fairly easy to implement. So we were able to do that very quickly. Whereas if we were to work to buy something from the marketplace, then we would have had to go through different rounds of evaluating the market and trying to find the right supplier, getting the right budget in place. Here, it was literally a zero budget. And just counting on volunteers from the Learning Next community to start exploring this.

Michelle Ockers:

So I imagine there's kind of tensions that you're managing there. You've talked about the data privacy and security requirements or considerations tend to lead you down the build path. Then you've got the tension around timeline and how long might it take us to build this versus buy it out of the marketplace. You know, what are some of the other key considerations that play into this decision about build, buy or wait?

Pauline Rebourgeon:

The key part really in that decision-making model is its flexibility. We need to remain agile. So like Peter said, when we make a decision on building something rather than buying it, this is not a permanent decision and we have to go for it. We need to make sure that we are able to continue to explore the different directions that we can take. And so we're still, you know, exploring the marketplace to see what are they doing, you know, especially with generativity goes so fast, there is so much happening in the market it is still fairly unstable. So we need to remain conscious of that as well and make sure that there is there is always a way to return and, and choose different routes. The worst that could happen with these kind of experiments is that people might have learned something in the process. For example, we actually get volunteers who are just happy to learn how to develop with AI models. And there's always something for us to learn from it, from a technical perspective, but also from a strategical perspective.

Peter Sheppard:

Michelle, another decision for us is around whether we have partners that can help us in the sort of builds and buys. So an example, and you know, of course, I can't resist bringing something in to do with skills. We are currently experimenting, running a test with an aggregated and inferred skill profile utilizing AI. And what we do there is we are looking at people's learning histories, we look at their job histories, and together with a whole number of different profiles and aggregate and infer their one skills profile. And that we are able to do because the partner that we work with has the capability to do that. So we looked and explored that capability that our partner has, because they have the abilities in this direction, the algorithms and so on that can make this work, then that becomes a decision, okay, this is worth building with this partner.

Michelle Ockers:

So clearly both internally and externally, you're leveraging a lot of resources, expertise, activities that others are doing, trying to be quite opportunistic and not building out a massive L&D innovation team yourself to run everything. Are you a team of one in this way, Pauline, or do you have others working with you or is everything done like you working through community, through partners and so on?

Pauline Rebourgeon:

Yeah, that's a great question, Michelle. And I guess, you know, at what point do you draw the line in, you know, how this is being driven? So, I mean, this is my mission within Ericsson. This is my main mission to nurture and maintain that community. It's a team effort with Peter and the Global Learning and Development team to identify the right strategy and

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make sure that we are working towards driving the business forward. And then we have what we call the core team, which is actually different, two tech areas that we're currently working on AI, but there's also XR that I mentioned earlier. So we have two core teams, I would say that will help us make sure that we are on the right path. And then I can count on many different, very active members from the community to make it work. And, actually, you know, I should not be the only one actually driving this. This should be driven by the community. And this is where it really started to get interesting when people starting to actually come up with ideas, come up with experiments and making their own little pilots and asking us for feedback and wanting to share with the community back to the community. So it's a team of many different facets, I would say. And that I have the privilege to drive and make sure that I remain as a connector and I'm able to just make sure that people are building relationships between each other and that's where the magic happens.

Michelle Ockers:

I was going to ask you what your superpower is in all of this. It sounds like connection, Peter. What's your observation on that?

Peter Sheppard:

I can describe Pauline's superpower, which is that she is a great connector. And I think actually, when you look at the skills to succeed with AI, it's not necessarily for L&D teams, the technical skills that helps. But it's not the detailed technical skills that necessarily make the difference. It's the ability to connect with people and bring people into this community and get everybody behind this. So, you know, to be clear, I would love to have a team of 100 people focused on all of this, but we haven't. It is Pauline driving a community and that connecting people across Ericsson and getting people enthusiastic about a topic, because what you are focusing on is making a difference to the business. So a lot of this, to some extent, is some of the old L&D capabilities and skills like performance consulting, like the ability to manage stakeholders, the ability to connect person A to person B. That actually is the skills that you need and to be able to see what will make a difference to achieving a business outcome. So, you know, we kind of gave the examples of coaching and translation. You know, AI-based coaching helps the democratization of coaching. Coaching typically has been something that has been the privilege of the few. You know, if you are a high flyer, you're an executive manager or whatever, then maybe you get some dedicated coaching. But what we're trying to do here is democratize. So that's a little bit about how we make it happen. And I'll get off my soapbox now, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it's a good soapbox to be on. I've long been a fan of community and connection to get things done. And there's so much potential we can tap into through reaching out and engaging others. Pauline, to what extent is there kind of a structured process to run these experiments versus kind of just letting people who you're connecting approach this kind of testing, learning in any way they want? What does that look like?

Pauline Rebourgeon:

So it will vary depending on the projects. We're running experiments, you know, some are bigger than others. In the case of translation, it kind of came naturally to a point where we needed to have our own data perception of what it could bring to the business. The point being, what are we trying to achieve and what are our success metrics? So it's always very tempting to just say, and we do it sometimes as well. We're not perfect. You know, we see that technology or we see that product. It's like, yeah, we want to try this, you know, but we try.

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Michelle Ockers:

The shiny new toy thing, right? Rather than grounding in what's the business opportunity or business need we're trying to address.

Pauline Rebourgeon:

Yeah, and it was certainly like Christmas, you know, when generative AI came up as well, because it was a range of new opportunities and new things that we couldn't do before, like text to video tool, you know, something that we didn't have two years ago. And now it seems to be a necessity for the entire L&D community. So it's something that we're also trying to address. Is that just a fad? Is that just something that, it's shiny, it's bright, but is it actually going to deliver on the results that we were hoping? And we're still actually trying to answer that question. So it's really about, you know, bringing back to what problem are we trying to solve? What are the use cases that we need to identify where the impact, where we can have the best impact, and then start testing with around these use cases and see how this can be scaled across the business. Because it's, you know, we tend to spend a lot of time around experimenting and pilot phase, but then it's like, okay, so how do you scale it up and actually make the impact that you were expecting?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. How do you balance, this one's really for you, Peter, balancing that kind of in your AI for L&D strategy, short-term wins with long-term bets. Like how do you figure out what are we going to invest our time and energy in experimenting with and that balance in the portfolio?

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah, it's a great question. And the bottom line is business impact and readiness. That is typically what we have done is in the whole area of Learning Next, as we call it, we tended to be in the past to be way too reactive and just treat almost any opportunity as they came up. And we took a very clear decision that we wanted to be more planned about things and create both an XR and an AI strategy. And what has been our guiding light on that is around what really makes a difference in the business and delivers business impact. But then we also need to be kind of cognizant of what we can achieve and what we can't achieve and how quickly we can achieve it. So going for something where we have technical capability to deliver but makes a difference in the business is how we decide what to go for or not. Now if the business impact is high, but actually it's going to be quite difficult to execute on, then that may be a long-term bet. And that's where there is the things like the translation piece or getting a text-to-video tool. We're just in the process of implementing Colossian as our text-to-video tool at the moment. And those in some ways are a lot easier. So we can get those as quick wins. And for example, with that text-to-video tool, we've already got 85 people using it. And they love it. You know, it's kind of an immediate hit. So that's how we try to judge the difference between long-term bets and short-term wins.

Michelle Ockers:

And in terms of getting engagement or buy-in to then take something to execution, I mean, there's a couple of examples you've talked about which seem fairly straightforward, the text-to-video, the translation. Let's go back to the coaching example. You know, how do you go from piloting? So you've done sort of some proof of concept. You're now piloting. You're not quite at the point yet of having made the build or buy decision due to this latency issue, which you're still grappling with. In terms of demonstrating the value of it and making some decisions around, well, how much might that be worth to the business and how are we going to determine how much to invest? and whether we keep moving on or whether we wait for something to shift in the commercial dynamics around this. You know, how do you go about

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tackling that question around demonstrating value and impact and making investment decisions in something which may fall more into this sort of potentially high impact but more difficult to execute category?

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah, I mean, one way is that we, if you take that coaching tool as an example, then we push the team working on it to adopt a design thinking approach. So they're really starting with what works for the employee, what works for the person, and help that guide the whole development of it. So that helps. The second piece is that we bring it then to the community, to the Next community. There we ask for feedback, and then we also drive out specific feedback on a tool through the focus groups. So, you know, we've got a main XR focus group and a main AI focus group, and then we drive out feedback through that as well as to what difference it will make. Ultimately, we always, and we're not there yet at all, some way off with the coaching tool, is that we would then pilot it, as most organizations would, with specific organizations. So it's a whole process of ensuring that you're connected to the business all the way from the very early design right through to, OK, I've really got something to deliver now.

Pauline Rebourgeon:

If I can add as well on this, I think the important piece is that we start small. So we're not just trying to really make a difference from the get-go, but really starting to experiment with small, zero-budget experiments, and then we're trying to paint a picture of what could it be if we had the right resources or if we had the right investment in place to make it happen. And that is also something that is helping us in the process to demonstrate the value and then get buy-in from stakeholders.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. So have there been any surprises or anything unexpected happen along the way on this journey with AI innovation in L&D?

Pauline Rebourgeon:

I can start. I think what has not surprised me, but I was expecting to be a lot more challenged on this innovation piece. When there is innovation, there's always detractors, always people who will be a bit more pessimistic. And we need these people in the community as well. Why are you doing this? Is there another way to do this? How is it going to impact my role? And actually, I found that the way we started with Generative AI is that we really tried to educate the community and bring all the points that we could, make a lot of research around this and really talk about how can that actually make you more productive and help you in your role and help you in your projects. And the community really remained very excited and open-minded while bringing challenges to the table. But I think that sense of let's just go ahead with it because it's going to be there for a while and there's nothing we can do about this. But what we can do is actually to embrace it and see what this is going to bring us and make sure that we're leveraging the way that we want and bring it forward to the business.

Peter Sheppard:

The other thing I would add is that what surprised me is the range. So some of these experiments are quite easy to execute on and so there is the availability of quick wins, but others are exceptionally complex and difficult. So actually that means your decision making process about what to choose and what makes a difference for your business is super important. So that kind of range has surprised me. Perhaps what is surprised even me and kind of Josh Berson calls it kind of the battle of the bots, I think recently, how many suppliers

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are just coming up with here's my AI bot, here's my AI solution, and you know, one of the things that I'd recommend people to do is to go around, and we've done this, go around to your suppliers ask them what they're doing because there could be some quick wins that just by effectively leveraging your suppliers and bringing their AI capabilities into your organizations.

Michelle Ockers:

That's such a great tip. Such a great tip. So that kind of leads us into the question around lessons learned. You've touched on several along the way, both of you, and I don't mind which of you starts, but any key lessons learned over the past couple of years as you've started experimenting with AI. Either about AI or about the experimentation and innovation process in a large, diverse organization such as your own, or about communities indeed, because that's at the heart of the way you've approached things.

Peter Sheppard:

Well, I'll kick off and then I'll leave the final word with Pauline. I think one of the big lessons learned for me is around be intentional. And what I mean by that is be clear about what you're planning to do, be clear about what you're aiming to do and will make a difference to your business. And I think we've made far greater progress by having a clear AI strategy, by communicating that strategy through the Learning Next community. And the second piece is, which I'll hand over to Pauline because she's really driven this, which is use the power of the many. The power of the many can be extraordinarily effective within an organisation once you galvanise it. And with that, I'll hand it over to Pauline.

Pauline Rebourgeon:

Yeah, Peter, I think you're absolutely right. It's, you know, the power of bringing people from different backgrounds different profiles, different locations together to make something happen that will actually resonate with the many. And this is probably what I've learned myself on this journey, building or rebuilding that community, but also what we can see as well with our generative AI strategies. There are so many different ways to approach it, but when we keep an open mind and we're not just in a little bubble, we do tend to do that sometimes within learning and development, just focusing on what we know, but actually open it to more stakeholders, to different teams. We have teams that have nothing to do with learning that are actually actively participants of this active participants of this community. We have the automation team without which we would not have been able to run any of these experiments around AI. Actually, that would have been a lot more painful. So it's really, you know, how do you get that the right resources when we don't have that much as much as we would like to and make it work for them and also bring it there? It's always a two way street. You know, it's not like we're just taking it in. But actually, they're also seeing a benefit. They're seeing a benefit in how, you know, this technology that they're building can apply to learning and development. And we are building that relationship. And that will help us drive the innovation forward. And that's the lesson that I've learned over the years. around that community driven approach.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic lessons. And in amongst all of that advice for others who maybe want to start innovating with AI or using communities to innovate in some way, in particular, without a large team or a big budget or a lot of resources. Is there any other advice you'd like to add for L&D professionals who are listening, who want to do more with innovation in communities or just innovation generally?

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Pauline Rebourgeon:

Right. What I would say is it's really about start exploring, start looking at some of these tools that you hear about. And if you have already done so, try to find how is that actually going to make my life easier or what kind of use cases could I apply them to my role, to my team, to my organization. And then The key thing here, maybe it could be as well, start small. It doesn't need a big budget, doesn't need budget at all sometimes to experiment with, you know, the first step into our AI coaching journey. It cost us nothing and maybe two weeks of my time to build something around coaching and showcase the value of it. That's all it took. And this is where things can get very interesting once you bring it to the conversation with your stakeholders. But, you know, starting small and having the right objectives in place could be quite powerful and the start of a beautiful journey.

Peter Sheppard:

Yeah. And a great example of that is, you know, Pauline brought her AI coaching, which took two weeks to kind of put a demo together to our executive leaders conference, which is the top 200 leaders in Ericsson, and really made an impact. So you can make an impact in quite a short time. The last thought I would leave you with is be prepared to pivot, because we were almost quite obsessed with XR, and XR still matters to us. And we were working a lot on different VR and AR solutions. But then we suddenly saw that AI was coming hard down the path. And we pivoted, probably too late, but we pivoted towards AI. So always being prepared to pivot in a new direction in the area of innovation. The last thing, very last thing, is give freedom. Innovation succeeds because of the environment it is in. You don't necessarily train somebody to be innovative. What you do is you create the environment for people to succeed. And creating that freedom only will stimulate innovation.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you so much, Peter and Pauline, for joining me today and for showcasing the work you're doing in this space to inspire others. We'll include a link to both of your LinkedIn profiles in the show notes, as well as on LinkedIn when we promote the episode, if anyone would like to find out more about today's conversation. Thank you so much for joining me for today's episode of Learning Uncut.

Peter Sheppard:

Our pleasure, Michelle. Thank you so much for having us.

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Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

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About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at Learning Uncut. She is an experience, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D *Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of learning and development*
- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*



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